

Soviet irregular warfare hits Manila

by Linda de Hoyos

The murder of three American servicemen in the Philippines, gunned down in four separate coordinated attacks Oct. 29, signals that Soviet irregular warfare has become the dominating feature of the insurgency violence in the Philippines.

The killing of U.S. soldiers "has broken the rules of the game" in the Philippines, where a "hands off" policy toward Americans has prevailed. It thus signifies that the conflict of the New People's Army against Manila is being transformed into a Soviet surrogate war against the United States in the Philippines itself. Such Soviet-guided irregular warfare is also likely to emerge in South Korea, and possibly Pakistan and Japan, as Soviet perception of the "final collapse of capitalism" in the West increases Moscow's boldness.

Within the Philippines, the murder of American soldiers has upped the pressure on the already-shaky government of President Corazon Aquino. In her 18 months in office, Aquino has alienated both the military and the "people's power" base that carried out the "February Revolution." The attack on Americans is designed to sever Aquino from her one remaining bastion of support: the U.S. government, especially the State Department.

NPA Escalation

The Oct. 28 attacks on the area outside Clark Field, the U.S. Air Force base in the Philippines, was part of an escalating pattern of terrorism in the country. The attacks on the servicemen were carried out with teams of assassins descending on the target, in one case, as many as 15 people. One Filipino civilian, who attempted to come to the aid of an American, was also killed.

The day after the Americans were killed, NPA guerrillas hit U.S. firms in the region of Cagayan de Oro City, including a Pepsi Cola plant in Barangay Tingaw, a Del Monte pineapple cannery in Barangay Bugo; and a Del-Monte-Philippines packing plant.

On Oct. 30, NPA hit squads in Manila claimed the lives of seven people, including a police officer famed for his anti-drug work.

On Nov. 2, five heavily armed men attacked and disarmed two security guards protecting housing in Angeles City, where many U.S. servicemen live, in a typical NPA weapons-seizure operation.

On Nov. 4, police disarmed a bomb at the slated site for

the December ASEAN summit in Manila, which represented an attempt to make it impossible for ASEAN to meet in the Philippines, to the embarrassment of the Aquino government.

Although the NPA denied responsibility for the Oct. 28 murders, subsequent events point to NPA culpability. During the week of the assassinations, four members of the NPA's National Democratic Front were arrested in Angeles City. Policemen found on their premises documents outlining a plan for the murder of Americans, called "Amerto"—an acronym for "Americans Targets of Opportunity." The confiscated documents included a guide for urban assassination.

On Nov. 6, the National Democratic Front issued a release warning the "United States government to stop meddling in the internal affairs of the Filipino people, or pay a high price . . . in terms of American lives and property." The statement accused the U.S. of aiding the Aquino government in waging a "total war" against the insurgency. "All U.S. military and civilian officials and personnel involved in carrying out the total war, whether the advisers, intelligence operatives, action agents, or in other functions, are therefore targets of the attack."

The Philippine military also released a seized document that contained guidelines for surveillance of potential targets, indicating that the NPA's "sparrow units" are now operating in the same mode as their Soviet-backed co-terrorists of the Green Party et al. in West Germany. Even early in October, the Northern Luzon chapter of the NPA had held a clandestine news conference at which rebel spokesman Ruth Firmeza announced, "If there is another coup or martial law, we will hit the U.S. imperialists, all American personnel, military, diplomatic or what." The NPA has reportedly drawn up a full "hit list," that includes U.S. government officials and American journalists in the Philippines.

The attack on American servicemen further signifies that the NPA internally is no longer the "indigenous group" that has been portrayed in the press. The Communist Party of the Philippines—the sponsoring organization for the NPA—is now officially tightening its ties with Moscow, amid reports that the NPA is receiving direction from Vietnamese trainers. In mid-October, the Bicol military command began receiving reports from residents that submarines had been delivering high-powered arms to NPA rebels through the Caramoan Peninsula in Camarine Sur. There is even speculation that the Oct. 28 assassinations of the Americans were carried out by Soviet spetsnaz—special forces—dropped off and then picked up again by Soviet subs.

Speculation that the terror-attack on Americans comes from "right-wing" forces who want to push the Aquino government over the brink does not detract from the fact that Soviet-directed irregular warfare has arrived in the Philippines. Moscow is looking to force the imposition of martial law or a "right-wing" military coup on Manila, thereby providing an open recruiting field for the insurgency and broad popular support for bringing the NPA terrorists to power.